

DOCUMENT RESUME

ED 329 907

CS 010 458

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TITLE A Study of Teachers' Viewpoints on Whole Language.
PUB DATE 90
NOTE 17p.
PUB TYPE Reports - Research/Technical (143)

EDRS PRICE MF01/PC01 Plus Postage.
DESCRIPTORS Educational Philosophy; Educational Research;
Elementary Secondary Education; Graduate Students;
Higher Education; *Preservice Teacher Education;
Reading Instruction; Self Evaluation (Individuals);
*Teacher Attitudes; *Theory Practice Relationship;
*Whole Language Approach
IDENTIFIERS Teacher Surveys

ABSTRACT

A study examined preservice teachers' self-ratings of interest/investment in the different contexts of an integrated whole language approach, both theoretically and pragmatically. Subjects, 60 graduate students enrolled in reading courses in a small eastern university, completed a self-rating chart dealing with the theory and classroom implications of whole language. The chart was completed before any whole language topics were presented in the courses. Results indicated that: (1) teachers subscribe either moderately or whole heartedly to the underlying theoretical base of an integrated whole language approach and to many of the classroom practices which this implies; but (2) many of these same teachers expressed major concerns about the teaching of whole language. Findings suggest that school districts, universities, professional organizations, and publishers need to offer more and better specifics of quality instruction within the whole language framework. (Two tables of data and the chart are included; 18 references are attached.) (RS)

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A STUDY OF TEACHERS' VIEWPOINTS ON WHOLE LANGUAGE

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A STUDY OF TEACHERS' VIEWPOINTS ON WHOLE LANGUAGE

As teachers grow in their knowledge and support of whole language, their viewpoints are influencing current reading practices and impacting on classroom instruction in the 1990's. All teachers are not committed to whole language. And of those who are committed to the philosophy, many do not necessarily share the same understanding of the underlying theory or of appropriate classroom application. Rather, each individual teacher seems to have a different commitment along a continuum of the whole language philosophy as he or she becomes increasingly knowledgeable about the process. Teachers' viewpoints on this subject are dictating a whole new teaching agenda for the decade. It is the purpose of this paper to study teachers' self ratings of interest/investment in the different contexts of an integrated language approach, both theoretically and pragmatically, and explore the implication of these ratings for the future.

Whole Language Rationale

What is whole language? Many including John Pikulsky writing in his regular column in the Reading Teacher (1988), feel it cannot yet be clearly defined. In this paper it is considered a concept springing from the psycholinguistic movement and based on the value of an integrated language approach to the teaching of reading. It suggests that reading can be taught only through use in meaningful situations. It states that language acquisition must be integrated into the child's functioning in the environment. It stresses the

importance of both the writing process and the reading process - in fact, it suggests that the two are really one. Kenneth Goodman (1986) has spelled out the foundation of the philosophy:

1. Language is used to communicate meaning. Comprehension of meaning or expression of meaning is always a primary goal.
2. Writing is a language process; oral and written language are very similar.
3. Language cuing systems interact in all four language arts areas. They should not be isolated.
4. Language usage occurs in authentic life situations. This context contributes to success or failure in reading or writing.
5. Life situations are of primary importance to the meaning inherent in language.
6. Risk taking, motivation, and predictability of text play important roles in learning to read and write.

With such a philosophy, a teacher (who knows her own pupils very well) can build her own curriculum, under the school system guidelines, to best meet her children's needs and interests. And of course the real-life situations in which language is used, whether they be literature, science, social studies, or other human activities, play a prominent part. Art, drama, music, and similar endeavors are all integrated into a truly horizontal program.

Probably most teachers, whether or not they advocate whole language, include some of the following experiences in their classroom: reading aloud, sustained silent reading and writing, process writing, and reading from literature. A teacher wishing to move along the continuum closer to an integrated language approach can start with these strengths and build on them. He or she can gradually take more and more control of the curriculum by developing themes or core experiences which incorporate aspects of the whole language

philosophy. A number of new books have been published to help the teacher move in this direction. Reading in Junior Classes, (1985), a guideline published by the New Zealand Department of Education, balances a pre-reading and beginning reading program with reading to children, shared reading, language experience, guided reading, independent reading, and writing. Editors Strickland and Mommons (1989) in their book on emerging literacy suggest inquiring activities, reading aloud and response to literature, sharing, shared reading and writing, independent writing and independent reading. Regie Routman (1988) describes her experiences in becoming a whole language advocate. And Brian Cutting (1990) spells out how to get started with a whole language classroom. (See references.)

Since teaching an integrated language approach involves the process of change in one's own philosophy, the stages of this change are not all the same and vary from teacher to teacher. It is a learning-by-doing process as the teacher learns from the response of children in the classroom. It involves risk. And it has yet to be thoroughly documented through scientific investigation.

Implications of teachers' viewpoints: a review of the literature.

Research in the whole language arena is rather sketchy and has just begun to explore classroom implications. (Harper, 1989; Mosenthal, 1989; Slaughter, 1988; Uinsworth, 1988; Shapino and Anderson, 1988; Edelsky, 1983). Additionally the study of the significance of teachers' viewpoints as they impact on this type of instruction has received little investigation to date.

Dorothy Watson (1984) in observing and describing two reading instruction procedures stemming from two different theoretical influences of two different teachers, analyzed results of the

Theoretical Orientation to Reading Profile (TORP), video tapes, and teachers' journals and concluded that in every category of observable data the teachers adhered closely to their theoretical models. Inservice and/or college courses which deal with theoretical foundations and curriculum development for the teaching of literacy in elementary schools (Andrews, 1989; Luke, 1989) also appear to suggest congruence between the theories and practice of their participants.

Thompson (1985), in reviewing the use of literature in a school, examined the practitioner's perspective of literature and how it is used in the classroom. She concluded that commonly occurring developmental literature curriculum objectives and similar professional materials (such as exposure to different literary genres and the recognition of the use of literary forms and devices) had limited influence on the practitioner. Her observations of classroom uses of literature led her to believe that practitioners were more apt to advocate helping students develop a love of reading or developing reading proficiency by reading rather than stated curriculum objectives.

It appears then that the theoretical viewpoint held by teachers does affect the emphasis for instruction observed in their classrooms.

A Teacher's Continuum

If many teachers in the 90's are moving toward a whole language philosophy, how does their changing viewpoint affect their teaching? Many find themselves struggling with some basic questions of both a theoretical and pragmatic nature. To help them categorize components of the movement and consider their perspective along the continuum of whole language, the following two-page chart dealing with both theory and implications in the classroom was devised.

The Continuum of Whole Language

Self Ratings of Teachers' interest/investment in different classroom contexts of an integrated language approach.

THEORETICAL FRAMEWORK: Would you be not interested, moderately interested, or very interested in each of these ideas?

Setting and Activities

Degrees of Interest/Investment

NONE

MODERATE

HIGH

- | | NONE | MODERATE | HIGH |
|--|------|----------|------|
| 1. The teacher should use real reading and writing activities in the classroom, moving away from exercises in reading and writing. | | | |
| 2. The teacher should use a rich variety of print in the classroom, including real literature, moving away from basals. | | | |
| 3. The teacher should use a variety of subjects such as science, social studies, music, etc. for continued reading instruction - moving away from dependence on content texts. | | | |
| 4. The teacher should continually assess and reassess children by diagnostic observation moving away from standardized test scores. | | | |

ANCILLARY FINDINGS/IMPLICATIONS IN THE CLASSROOM: Would you be not interested, moderately interested or very interested in implementing each of the following teaching ideas?

NONE

MODERATE

HIGH

- | | NONE | MODERATE | HIGH |
|--|------|----------|------|
| 1. Under the school district curriculum guide, the teacher should become the major organizer of the classroom curriculum, relying on a variety of materials rather than basically one publisher's manual. | | | |
| 2. The classroom curriculum should be comprised of literature and other areas of interest (themes) exclusively with less and less of the use of basal reading and single context texts. | | | |
| 3. The children's reading, writing, art work, drama, music, poetry and other activities should be incorporated into the curriculum while all skill books and ditto exercises should be completely omitted. | | | |
| 4. Phonics should be taught diagnostically from individual children's needs and the context of reading and writing without workbooks or day-to-day teachers' guides. | | | |
| 5. The grouping in the classroom should not be based exclusively on levels of reading achievement but rather also on interests, knowledge of subject matters, friendships, and one-to-one shared activities. | | | |
| 6. The children's reading progress and instructional level should be regularly monitored by the teacher using tools such as a running record. | | | |
| 7. The teacher should start language experience and developmental writing in kindergarten and gradually do away with packaged readiness programs. | | | |

Do you have major concerns about the implementation of whole language teaching? If so, what are they?

A Survey Using the Teachers' Continuum and Self-Ratings

In this study the continuum self-rating chart was administered to 60 graduate students enrolled in reading courses in a small eastern university in 1990. The survey was completed early in the semester before whole language topics were presented or discussed in class. Students ranged in experience from certification students, some with no teaching experience, to teachers who had been in the classroom as many as eight years. It was hypothesized that whole language might well not be for everyone, and that because many teachers might feel most comfortable with basal manuals and curriculum guides, there would be no differences between their ratings of none, moderate, or high degrees of interest in whole language activities.

This could not have been further from the truth.

Results

Results were as follows.

Numbers of self-rating on the continuum of whole Language.

<u>Activities</u>	<u>No Interest</u>	<u>Moderate</u>	<u>High Interest</u>
<u>Theoretical Framework</u>			
1. Real reading and writing		8	52
2. Real literature rather than basals.		4	56
3. Variety of subjects moving away from dependence on content texts.	1	19	40
4. Continual teacher informal assessment rather than standardized tests.		15	45
<u>Classroom Implications</u>			
1. Teacher organizer of curriculum.		11	49
2. Real literature rather than basal.		8	52
3. Integrated activities rather than ditto.		36	24
4. Phonics taught diagnostically through needs rather than workbooks, etc.	2	19	39
5. Variety of grouping rather than sole reading achievement grouping.	2	25	33
6. Monitored children's reading progress, perhaps with running record.		9	51
7. Language experience and developmental writing in kindergarten.	1(undecided)	9	50

A χ^2 was used on each item to test whether the distribution was uniform across the three values. Results indicated that they were not. All values were significant at the .01 level (the value for χ^2 at the .01 level with 2 degrees of freedom must exceed 9.21).

Results of χ^2

<u>Theoretical Framework</u>	<u>χ^2</u>
1. Real reading & writing	78.4
2. Real literature rather than basals	97.6
3. Variety of subjects moving away from dependence on content texts.	38.1
4. Continual teacher informal assessment rather than standardized tests.	52.5
<u>Classroom Implications</u>	
1. Teacher organizer of curriculum.	66.1
2. Real literature rather than basal.	78.4
3. Integrated activities rather than ditto.	33.6
4. Phonics taught diagnostically through needs rather than workbooks, etc.	34.3
5. Variety of grouping rather than sole reading achievement grouping.	25.9
6. Monitored children's reading program, perhaps with running record.	74.1
7. Language experience and developmental writing in kindergarten.	69.1

On a theoretical bases, most teachers professed to use real reading and writing activities in the classroom, moving away from exercise, and to use a rich variety of print, including real literature, moving away from basals. A majority of teachers also preferred to use a variety of subjects such as science, social studies and music rather than content area texts and to assess children by diagnostic observation rather than standardized tests.

Ancillary findings involving classroom implications while still decisive, had more variance. Overall it appeared that teachers had higher interest in becoming the major organizer of their own classroom curriculum, using literature and themes rather than basal and context texts, monitoring children's instructional level with tools such as a running record, and starting language experience and developmental writing in kindergarten. Teachers' self-ratings were more evenly divided between moderate and high on the issues of phonic instruction and grouping. The only statement which received more moderate ratings than high ratings suggested that all skill books and ditto exercises should be completely omitted.

Teachers' written comments on this survey appeared to cover a wider range on the continuum than did the self-ratings. Comments ranged from those who asked concerned questions about whole language teacher training or child assessment to those who felt confident with their implementation of the philosophy. Specific questions and statements follow:

1. Since whole language means many things to many people, should a more specific definition be in order?
2. How can we cover all the areas of reading instruction that are necessary?
3. Will teachers be adequately trained in the use of whole language?

4. How will beginning teachers of whole language cover necessary skills that primary children need for success?
5. How is comprehension taught?
6. How does the teacher manage to get around to all children to teach reading skills?
7. How can we develop program evaluation?
8. What are the implications of heterogeneous grouping for previously labeled gifted or basic skill students?
9. How can we accurately evaluate children's progress? What about assessment? Evaluation?
10. No concerns. A teacher of eight years wrote that she was currently using whole language in her kindergarten classroom and thoroughly enjoying it. Several other statements support her.

Discussion

It appears from this survey that teachers are subscribing either moderately or whole heartedly to the underlying theoretical base of an integrated language approach and to many of the classroom practices which this implies. It may be that they genuinely support the fundamental principles inherent in the philosophy. Or it may be that they feel whole language represents a current up-to-date state-of-the-art educational movement and they wish to be part of the flow. Perhaps they only wish to support their peers and professors. At any rate, apparently few will admit to not being at least moderately interested. Teachers themselves, at the grass roots level, are providing much of the thrust and momentum of the whole language movement.

Yet in their comments, many of these same teachers express major concerns about the teaching of whole language. They are asking for clarification and support on a range of topics, beginning with more clear-cut definitions and continuing on to such topics as teacher training, curriculum planning, grouping, and assessment.

Clearly there are teachers who need more help in becoming the major organizers of a balanced curriculum. They need and want support in developing a literature based program, in theme development, in integrating writing, art, drama, music, poetry, and other activities with reading, in the diagnostic teaching of phonics, in flexible grouping, in day-to-day assessment of reading progress, and in developmental teaching to the strengths and needs of all children including those just emerging into literacy.

School districts, universities, professional organizations, researchers, and publishing houses are contributing, each in their own way, along the continuum of whole language, to support quality teaching of reading. However, it must be remembered that research supports good traditional teaching practices including teacher instruction of important skills and strategies (Anderson, 1985, Pikulski, 1988) as well as the new theories. Today every school should have its own reading specialist devoting a large share of time to teacher/administrator consultations and inhouse ongoing staff development. The teachable moment, not only for whole language, but also for better reading instruction, has arrived.

Conclusion

This survey indicates that many teachers are committed to the whole language movement. Some are expressing concerns about good teaching practices. While more research is needed, it appears that school districts, universities, professional organizations and publishers need to offer more and better specifics of quality instruction within the whole language framework. In addition the strengths from this century's teaching of reading both through research and teaching perspective should not be ignored. We have an opportunity to help children read and write as they never have before: let's not lose it by providing inadequate support to a dynamic philosophy whose time has come.

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